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ABSTRACT

The Kyrgyz Republic--a remote mountainous region--is one of five former Soviet states in central Asia. This case study begins with a brief overview of the political and economic situation of the Kyrgyz Republic and its relation to aims of Soviet schooling in the 20th century. A critique of the Soviet schooling model by foreign academics before and after the breakup of the former USSR is followed by a discussion of how economic collapse during the 1990s led to numerous curricular and organizational crises in Kyrgyz education. The second half of this paper details the forces and actors dedicated to "improving" Kyrgyz schools in the new millennium. Since the Soviet breakup, foreign actors have been trying to influence economic and educational policy consistent with their worldviews and political agendas. There is great disagreement between foreigners and locals as to the means and ends of schooling and about how (or even if) schools should be "fixed." A new pro-Western Minister of Education put together a strategic planning process for reforming the nation's schools. Brainstorming efforts, primarily involving foreigners and high-level administrators, focused on decentralization, corruption in the university system, the need to cut higher-education budgets to fund reforms in secondary education, consolidating rural schools, academic standards, teacher retraining and salaries, efficiency, and technology. The procedures, dynamics, and recommendations of the working group on school management and minimum standards and the working group on teacher retraining and new technologies are detailed. Resistance and barriers to change are discussed. (Contains 33 footnotes.) (TD)

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West Meets East in Central Asia:

Competing Discourses on Secondary Education Reform

In the Kyrgyz Republic

January 2002

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WEST MEETS EAST IN CENTRAL ASIA: COMPETING DISCOURSES ON SECONDARY EDUCATION REFORM IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Alan DeYoung

The Kyrgyz Republic is one of five former Soviet states in Central Asia. It is a mostly mountainous nation today of approximately 4.8 million people, lying to the south of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, to the west of China, and to the east of Uzbekistan. Although it's relatively small population and geographical obscurity might make internal dynamics of lesser concern to the West, for a number of reasons this has not been the case. Central Asia has for thousands of years been the site of keen geopolitical competition between various despots, cultures, and colonial empires. Alexander the Great, Ghengis Khan, Tamerlane and Stalin all left their marks here. The Silk Road and political and military contests over its control played out for a thousand years across this territory, and the Great Game pitted the British Empire against Russia here in more recent history. The previous winner of the contest for Central Asia, Russia and then the USSR, carved up Turkestan into separate states in order to stem any Turkic national or Islamic fervor from disrupting its plan for a secular nation. The tragic events of September 11, 2001 involving Afghanistan and the other contiguous Central Asian states, underscore the significance of this previous and continuing effort. (1)

Competition between East and West continues today in Central Asia. Here, external actors try to influence policy and practice consistent with inconsistent worldviews. The Kyrgyz Republic lies in the middle of this region, and control of its political economy and schooling is not being left to chance. Local borders are contested with its neighbors, economic development patterns depend upon collaboration with states that it at the same time seeks to become culturally distinct from, and external military alliances are

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critical as the nation is too poor and ill equipped to control its own destiny. Public education, too, is involved here with alternative political and economic visions of who should go to school and what should be learned. Such matters are the implicit and explicit concerns of this essay. (2)

AIMS AND METHODS OF THIS PAPER

This paper is primarily concerned with the twentieth century history of school reform in the Kyrgyz Republic and the current influence of America and the West. In this case study I briefly overview the political and economic situation of the Kyrgyz Republic and its relation to aims of Soviet schooling during the twentieth century. Then the discussion turns to critique of the Soviet schooling model expressed by foreign academics before and following the breakup of the former USSR, moving to a discussion of how economic collapse during the 1990s led to numerous curricular and organizational crises in Kyrgyz education. Very recently there has been an important effort to affect school policy and reform in the country, much of it coming from Western sources and brought on by foreign organizations. The second half of the paper details these forces and actors dedicated to "improving" Kyrgyz Schools in the new millennium. The Western effort took on a new dimension in 2001 with the appointment of a reform-minded pro-Western Minister of Education whose own career has also been improved and facilitated via foreign support.

As a foreign academic, I was invited to participate in six-month long strategic planning process for reforming the nation's schools, part of which informs my discussion and analysis. (3) Contests between ownership of this process and the documents we produced are also detailed in this paper. Data for the case study portion of this manuscript come from many hours of participation in strategic planning sessions, documents produced before and during the process, as well as interviews with key locals and foreigners as to the likely impact of the planning process.(4). Local participants (including several in the Ministry of Education and Culture) and several involved foreigners read and critiqued early versions of this manuscript. In this paper I deal with both issues of and discourse about the reform of secondary schooling in Kyrgyzstan from what emerged as competing perspectives. Contests over the direction of higher education are mentioned here, but not in detail.(5) Also, since school reform tends to be a continuous process, this document is really about what may or may not later prove to be a critical period in Kyrgyz

educational history. I begin with some narrative of the history and culture of Central Asia and the Kyrgyz Republic.

THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Kyrgyzstan is not as well known as other Central Asian states. To the north is much larger and oil-rich Kazakhstan. To the south and west of Kyrgyzstan lie Uzbekistan, long the leader of settled cultures in Turkestan and today essentially a political dictatorship. "Kirgizia" as a territory was amalgamated into Russia from the middle of the nineteenth century, formally becoming a republic of the USSR in 1936. Over 93% of the country's 77,000 square miles are mountainous. Nomadic livestock herding has been the primary economy here for virtually all if Kyrgyzstan's history. For such reasons, scholarship on this region appears mostly in Central Asian compendia, or as lesser chapters in works on the Kazkahs or the Uzbeks.(6)

Gleason argues that Kyrgyzstan was in effect a Soviet "mountain outpost" for much of the twentieth century, and less integrated into the Soviet political economy than were most of its neighbors. (7) "Democratization" began here as in the other Central Asian states in late 1991 as the former USSR collapsed and the various republics declared independence. But there never was an independent political state in Kyrgyzstan before the Russians, and never any central government or public institutional history. Both the Kyrgyz and Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republics formally opposed the dismemberment of the Soviet Union in 1991. When the Newly Independent States (NIS) of Central Asia were created and appeared to emerge as sites for democracy and nation building, the West (and particularly the US) quickly began to focus upon the Kyrgyz Republic. Kyrgyzstan appeared to be a most suitable state for Western influence not only because if had been historically less integrated into the former USSR, but also because its new president had been an academic and a newcomer to national leadership just before independence, and not a lifetime member of the Communist Party.

> After independence, Bishkek (the capital city) quickly became the favorite city of European, North American and Asian diplomats and development assistance officials. Since the Kyrgyz capital is located close to Almaty (capital of Kazakhstan), it was an easy stopover for Western diplomats, economic specialists, and businesspeople on their way to and from (Kazakhstan). Although Bishkek did not have the infrastructure of Almaty, the Kyrgyz commitment to reform impressed everyone. Kyrgyz citizens took

> pride in asserting that Kyrgyzstan was not an "Islamic-communist-feudal" society of backward Asia, but rather a society seeking to develop European-style democratic institutions and social programs (8).

This development of "European style democratic institutions and social programs" (and the market economy they were expected to further) did not fare as well as hoped in the decade of the 1990s. Factionalism and various forms of intrigue led to internal chaos of the country: the boycotting of parliamentary sessions, mass resignation of Cabinet ministers, restrictions on press freedoms, rejection and reformation of the national constitution, a probably illegal (and internationally criticized) re-election of the president for a third term of office, and other developments less flattering to any would-be democracy. With regard to social programs and trends, they also went into a tailspin during the last decade. (9)

SOCIAL ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

The Kyrgyzstan 1999 Common Country Assessment, underwritten by the United Nations, sketches the economic and social problems of the republic in its monograph on various indicators. It details economic decline, falling expenditures on health, social security, education, childcare, and environmental programs, increases in out-migration of mostly non-ethnic Kyrgyz, internal migration from villages to the cities, and suggests that poverty and unemployment are typical characteristics of over half of the population. The report argues though that the major crisis period is now over, and leaders and citizens of the republic must shoulder the onerous task of self-reforming its own economic and social institutions. Only internal changes, says the report, can now sustain the limited progress already achieved. On the other hand, there are hundreds of thousands (at least) here who yet wish that the USSR could be reconstituted. The CCA states:

> During the last few years, human security increasingly came under threat. First of all, there is a high level of poverty. During the last two decades of the Soviet era, the people had become used to a state-guaranteed living standard. Food, employment, education and basic health-care service were provided to everybody and were ensured in less or more fixed amounts – independently of the individual's efforts or resources. The abrupt changes after 1991 not only blew those securities away, but also caught the majority of people unprepared. … a considerable part of the due reforms are undertaken, but the most difficult stage is yet to come: to avoid the development of a society with a very high, chronic poverty rate and income disparity, in which sustainable human development will cease to be a priority. (10)

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOVIET KYRGYZ SCHOOLING

As there is virtually no literature specific to the history of the Kyrgyz Republic, there is likewise almost nothing in either Soviet or Western literatures on formal (particularly secondary) education here until this decade. There are now several technical economic and human social development reports, like the CCA study just mentioned, which do include education among the statistical topics. (11). By Western notions, Soviets did not "study" schools or school cultures; and unlike many other former (European) Soviet states, the Kyrgyz nomads had virtually no formal schools until Russian colonization (12) Twentieth century Russian and Soviet schools here were directed from Moscow. Curricula, staffing qualifications, texts and school organization models were all imported from Moscow via the relevant ministries. Asking research questions that even suggested that there were legitimate academic concerns or issues in individual republics was not (and remains little) encouraged. (13)

The absence of concern for local input into education reveals the political economy and cultural concerns of the Russians and then the Soviets, much as the aims and ambitions of the West are revealed today in the programs and ideologies we import. The problem of schooling was pronounced for the Soviets in their goal to create the new socialist citizen in Central Asia. Local cultures had and have worldviews and patterns very different than those in Europe and the US, and schools have often been the advance guard for acculturating/indoctrinating the next generation in far-flung colonies of major powers. Soviets used the schools intentionally combat (pan-Turkic) nationalism and religion (Islam). Gleason underscores part of the cultural problem for Soviets in Central Asia that schools would come to target:

> To outsiders, Central Asian political practices often seem idiosyncratic and subject to mysterious protocols, secretive and mutual understandings, and subtle but powerful local political idioms. Central Asian traditions of patriarchy, popular submissiveness, deference to authority and to elders, and weak democratic institutions would seem to impel Central Asian societies toward an authoritarian future. … Perhaps the most visible aspect of the public culture of these countries is the great importance associated with *hurmat,* the idea of "deference" or "respect." … *Hurmut* begins in the family. Personal life is family life in Central Asian societies: property is communal, (food) is shared, elders are given deference without question, and women are subordinated. Authority is personalized. (14)

Although Leninism and scientific socialism was theoretically dedicated to opposing many Central Asian political, religious and culture patterns, (late) Soviet socialism failed seriously in practice. These failings would also come to undermine many of their professed formal schooling hopes. In theory, dedication to the extended family was supposed to yield to dedication to the state and Communist Party,

and deference due to age and clan leadership was to give way to respect for scientific specialization, party membership and equal worker participation in collective decision making. Religion and the weight of tradition was also to yield to the new-found certainty of scientific socialism and industrial technology; gender inequality was to be replaced by equal opportunity and reproductive freedom; and inequality of any sort was to be replaced by the true equality only socialism could bring to cure the fundamental flaws of social life found in feudal and capitalist cultures.

Soviet pedagogy attempted to instill these new cultural practices by offering curricula, school and youth organizations to counter local variants. It created mass literacy in places where there was none before. It also ostensibly created avenues to longer and improved lives for former peasants and tribesmen. The children of serfs and nomads could use schools to better their lot in life rather than being locked into poverty and backwardness as a function of their parents' often-difficult social and economic status. Children were to be educated in cohorts, and not to be identified as fast and slow learners as in the bourgeois West. Soviet schooling was philosophically dedicated to principles of liberal arts and humanities for the masses; all education was secular and not subject to the "opiate" of formal religion or other "superstitions;" music and art education were seen as birthrights; women were enfranchised in the school as they were supposed to be in the economy; and education included "upbringing" (vospitanie), meaning that children's' social and emotional well being were considered the responsibility of the state (and of the teacher), not just parents or the clan. (15) Anara Tabyshalieva reviews the improved status of women in Kyrgyzstan during Soviet times to illustrate some of the above points:

> … the Communist Party emphasized the importance of women as mothers and workers, and it is undeniable that great progress was made in many aspects of women's life – healthcare, paid maternity leave, and numerous kindergartens all testify to this. There are other examples too. In a break from tradition and Islamic norms, women gained custody of their children after divorce. Greatly improved healthcare meant that, for the first time, women made up more than 50 percent of the population. The literacy rate among women was almost 100 percent, and the majority of doctors, chemists, and biologists in Central Asia were women – a feature unusual even in the developed countries. The high level of women's employment was proclaimed as a supreme achievement of "developed socialism." (16)

For better or worse, all Soviet reforms were also clearly tied to the political economy of Marxism-Leninism. Mass literacy was needed to be sure that workers would work for a new social order, and that the rhetoric and ideology of the state could inspire them. Building a new socialist worker also demanded

industrial and scientific agriculture skills demanding literacy and numeracy. Party leadership was held forth as attainable and party membership desirable, but the new cadres of socialists in the emerging workers' paradise could not depend on adults reared in the old way or in the old systems. Women were needed as teachers and scientists, and they had to be trained. And children had to become and be seen as citizens of the state foremost, and as individuals or family members secondly. By any reading, Soviet ideology and pedagogy was an assault on any and all claims to the authority of tribe, clan, religion and family, all critical cultural characteristics of many non-Slavic peoples in the former USSR.

REALITIES OF (LATE) SOVIET LIFE

But the Soviet reality was far from the theory, and many in Central Asia, particularly those in rural places, either did not take advantage (or were spared the excesses) of actual Soviet policy. Ethnic Russians were overly-represented in leadership positions in the Communist Party, and the excesses of those on the inside became increasingly recognized by the 1960s. Connections rather than merit distinguished those who got opportunity from those who did not. Local soviets had minimal or no control over means and ends of their work. Women rarely got into leadership positions in the Party or in government, and they still had to rear the children and perform the predicted household duties after work. What actually emerged were mostly new hierarchies and new inequalities, new prohibitions on speech and human rights, new fears of those in power and those who might be working for them, and new strategies for how to survive the "blessings" of Leninism in practice. (17) According to Fairbanks, the USSR actually re-instituted a new feudalism to run the country instead of the rational and equal system it proclaimed. When "privatization" finally came in the 1990s, many of those holding the reigns of institutional power took advantage of their bureaucratic control of state resources by charging fees, selling off assets, or taking even larger bribes:

> To a surprising degree, the Soviet system empowered informal, illegitimate private powers in order to run important institutions. … Within the party apparatus, feudal exchange relationships were used to run the Soviet State, at least from the time of Stalin. … (after independence) for every agency of the Russian government, including the army, the security police and the Presidential Administration, there seem to be "non-budget funds" – that is, sources of income that do not depend on the state budget. … Almost every (post-Soviet) official has both an impersonal bureaucratic role and a personal profitmaking role; almost every (bureaucrat) serves and profits from two masters. (18)

Kenneth Jowitt argues that those seeking to bring about liberal democracies and capitalism throughout the post-Soviet world (including Kyrgyzstan) are faced with what he calls the Leninist "legacy." Many of the substantive problems in reforming public schooling in the Kyrgyz Republic have their roots in the dilemmas Fairbanks (above) and Jowitt (here) outline:

> Class war, the Correct Line, the Party as a superior and exclusive locus of political leadership and membership, and the Soviet Union as the incarnation of revolutionary socialism have all been rejected in the (former) Soviet Union, and the support of the Soviet Union (was) withdrawn from Leninist replica regimes... ... (one) result has been the ... emergence of successor governments aspiring to democracy and capitalism but faced with a distinct and unfavorable Leninist legacy. That legacy includes a "ghetto" political culture that views government and the political realm suspiciously, as a source of trouble and even danger. It includes societies marked by distrust; filed with Hobbesian competition; and habituated to hoarding – the sharing only with intimates – information, goods and goodwill. The Leninist legacy also includes rumor as a mode of discourse that works against the sober public discussion of issues; a segmentary rather than complementary socio-economic division of labor, in which the semiautarchic workplace favors social insulation; a political leadership whose charismatic and storming approach to problems did very little culturally or psychologically to familiarize those societies with "methodically rational" action ... All in all these features do not constitute a legacy that favors liberal capitalism and democracy. (19)

SOVIET SCHOOLING

The aims and culture of schooling imposed (or extended) under the Soviet Union in principle offered a world-view and teachings diametrically opposed to the organizational principles and cultures of Central Asia. Soviet pedagogy undermined the family and offered the collective (or soviet) in its place; trained for an industrial (or mechanized agricultural) society rather than a pastoral one; challenged (rhetorically at least) patriarchy and insisted on equity; and presented a secular (and mostly Western) humanities and civilizations curriculum opposed to Islam and the East. This model actually had its admirers as well as detractors in the West. Soviet schools elevated children to great extent compared to adults, and they received special social treatment in many ways; intense academic competition between individuals and tracking/grouping were minimized; national literacy rates increased exponentially in early years of the USSR; schooling was free; and humanities instruction in the arts and music and literature were considered essential, rather than being reserved only for the elite. (20)

But the curriculum, organization and practice of Soviet (and Kyrgyz) schooling has also been widely criticized. Among the concerns were the extreme centralization of Soviet schooling, its

(intentional) disregard for ethnic and cultural differences among the many non-Slavic republics; its incredible inefficiencies in organization and operation; its dogmatic treatment of political and social issues; its general curriculum "overloading;" and endemic credential corruption. So too, Soviet and Kyrgyz schools always focused on the "Learning Plan," not on learner outcomes. As in most schools, Kyrgyz teachers even today focus upon the top twenty or thirty percent of their students, rarely on those less talented or uninterested in their studies (21).

Heyneman cogently links issues in post Soviet schooling with Jowitt's general assessment of the Leninist legacy. (22) He suggests three general types of educational crises in the former USSR since its collapse. The first was/is *expenditure decline*, which resulted from the loss of school operating funds from state budgets in all the republics as they moved from a planned economy to a market economy. Wages, salaries, building infrastructure, curricular materials, and informational technologies have all suffered dramatically during the past decade as expenditures for education dropped by an average of 50% (or more) in most CIS republics since 1991. A second general set of issues related to school reform in the former USSR involves *decentralization and destabilization.* In their haste to free the system from the former schooling model, uncontrolled and/or planned practices to decentralize and/or privatize schools were initiated without working out many critical details. For instance, devolving school finance and building management to local state (oblast) governments proved counterproductive when sub-government units had no taxing authority or curricular independence.

A third set of problems, and ones very crucial to our forthcoming discussion, Heyneman terms *structural anomalies.* Soviet schools were essentially devoid from any market forces (or metaphors). Their outputs (graduates) were not controlled by supply and demand, but dictated by ministries of agriculture and industry (for example). Internal school dynamics were likewise unregulated by matters of efficiency or accountability. With a command economy, there were more typically more teachers than required to do the teaching, so scheduling them or retraining them was rarely a high priority. Schools did not need expensive libraries and research facilities. Students were not expected to find new or novel answers to curricular concerns and questions, but rather to memorize materials often read to them by teachers. And teachers themselves were cut off from learning innovative technologies and acquiring new

methods. These were left to specialists and to special institutes, not incorporated into teacher training as part of any process for continual school improvement.

CURRENT CRISES IN KYRGYZ SCHOOLING

Although the Soviets rarely documented and publicized the shortcomings and issues in Kyrgyz Schooling, there are today a plethora of such reports and documents produced by outsiders who note primarily the difficulties and weaknesses of Kyrgyz schools rather than strengths. (23) Given very different social and political aims for schools between Soviets and the West, this is not a surprise. Few foreign advisors here in my encounters express much admiration neither for Soviet schooling aims or successes nor for various Central Asian customs that they do not understand. Locals, on the other hand, seem to remember mostly the positives of the previous system, and many in the meetings about to be discussed were more interested in gaining funding to return to former practices as opposed to desiring the sorts of grand changes outsiders were to recommend.

How forces of the West confront the "legacy" of Soviet schooling to be found today in Kyrgyzstan is the focus of the remaining discussion. It relies primarily upon local sources, local examples, interviews, and my own participant-observation opportunities in 2001 rather than upon the historical/theoretical literatures previously cited. (24) The general aim was to determine whether and to what extent the available western critique of Soviet and post-Soviet schooling is relevant to contemporary educational reform dynamics in one former Soviet republic about which almost nothing has been written before. The aims and benefits of an ethnographic case study for dynamics like those to be described are explained by Yin:

> The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. Thus the case study relies on many of the same techniques as history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian's repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing. … the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews and observations – beyond what might be available in the conventional historical study. (25)

As the following will show, foreigners and locals here differ on what needs to be done to improve formal schooling in Kyrgyzstan today. In other words, there is great disagreement between the groups the means and ends of schooling and about how (or even if) schools should somehow "be fixed." There is no real disagreement, though, that there are serious problems. *The Times of Central Asia*, a widely read

regional newspaper, highlighted statistics on educational problems in the Republic recently, noting mostly the financial ones. (26). The author, Tatyana Mordacheva, summarized the decreasing numbers of students and finances for their support here since independence from various government documents. She noted for instance that higher secondary school enrollments in Kyrgyzstan had declined from 84% to 69% of the school age population between 1993 and 1999. She specifically suggested that only 60% of all 16 year olds are enrolled in school today, compared to over 90% in 1991. Meanwhile, the number of preschool centers (universal in Soviet times) declined from 1,604 centers to 416 during this same period. Most of these declines were interpreted as the outcome of a precipitous decline in national school funding. Investment in education declined in the Kyrgyz Republic from 8.2% of GDP in 1990 to 3.5% in 1995, where it has stayed. Such data also minimizes the fact that other resources have disappeared for education too. During Soviet times, for example, local plants and collectives were patrons (shefy) of local schools and children, providing non-cash goods and services to supplement government payments.

The Times report does not always correspond with other data sources available here in the republic, which underscores a lack of consistency in data collection and reduction still today. One thing that most donor organization (above) studies agree upon, though, is that virtually all real expenditures here this decade have been dedicated to teacher salaries. There has been almost no investment in textbooks, computers, building construction or even building maintenance from state resources. Statistics do tend to substantiate declines in enrollment percentages, although absolute enrollments have increased due to fertility and in-migration factors (including refugees). Vigorous migration from rural places to the cities has seen the double and triple scheduling of older city schools. Latest official education ministry figures suggest over one million students in Kyrgyz schools, and 70,000 teachers. However, remaining teachers earn less than poverty wages and were mostly trained before independence.

EXTERNAL DONORS AND INVESTORS

There are two general perceptions of cultural/political problems and sorts of solutions adhered to among the foreigners involved in education reform in the Kyrgyz Republic. One holds that post-Soviet republics need to develop a "open societies," where the rule of law and respect for human rights is paramount. Local advocates for human social and political rights see education at all levels as critically

important in this effort. Democracy depends upon an active and involved citizenry, and various foundations and organizations from abroad are involved in teaching and supporting such activities in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2001. (27) The 1999 *Building Open Societies* report by the Soros Foundation details the philosophy and activities they are engaged in throughout the former Soviet republics. Their assessment of need for neighboring Kazakhstan is in line with the open society rationale in Kyrgyzstan, where they spent more than $6 million in 1999:

> …the 20th century brought about totalitarian control events that contributed to a closed society. … People suffered and grew passive as they endured revolution, strikes, and the economic and social experiments of a dictatorial authority. … Not much has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union in terms of people's attitudes. Since independence, those in power act as if they are "vremenshiki," or temporary rulers, lacking a vision of the future. Many challenges lie ahead for the advocates of an open society, with it bright, enlightening orientation to humanism, education, democracy, and tolerance. (28)

Less explicitly dedicated to the "bright and enlightening future" of an open society than the Soros author above are the international banking and investment community who tend to view NIS republics primarily as future participants in the world capitalist economy. With a nod to the importance of human rights and the rule of law (above), their efforts are more directed at transforming what was a command economy into a demand economy. For the development banks, the most immediate problem with Kyrgyzstan is that it cannot join or compete in a market economy, as its industries and worker skill bases (among other things) are underdeveloped. Although most of their investments in the country actually go into other sectors, they all have "human resource" policies on investing in education in the Kyrgyz Republic. Their language, though, less frequently uses words like "humanism," and more typically such phrases as "rationalization." and efficiency.

Three of the largest external investors into educational improvement and reform in the Kyrgyz Republic are the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the US government (Department of State and the Agency and for International Development). The banks have authorized loans for up to $30 million for improvement of operational efficiency of the education system, for instituting vocational training programs and teacher retraining, and for infrastructure improvements in schooling. US State Department monies (much channeled through ACCELS) and AID grants are a bit more diffuse and

"humanistic," but still mostly directed at "rationalizing" the system (USAID has spent over $180 million dollars on many different programs in Kyrgyzstan since independence). Rationalization in this context means redirecting school resources and programs toward educational programs that will produce workers and consumers in the global market, and school organization and operations that are cost effective and "transparent."

The Asian Development Bank has made available (in the form of loans) to the Kyrgyz Republic over 25 million dollars for education since 1997. In one of their major education sector reviews, they underscore the expenditure declines (noted above) in the Republic since independence, but pay more particular attention to the school (mis)management, funding inefficiencies and curriculum misalignment they claim are partly responsible for Kyrgyzstan's inability to transition to a market economy. Their review is peppered with such phrases as "poorly managed," "poor linkage between education and the labor market," and remaining "authoritarian teaching practices:"

> The education sector has not yet adjusted effectively to its reduced budgetary support. That would require an overall sectoral rationalization or the setting of priorities to guide decisions about investments in education. Various indicators .... Suggest that the sector is still highly inefficient. Instead, the government is coping with the fiscal crisis through temporary measures (e.g., deferred maintenance, reduced resources for basic education materials and supplies, sharp drops in teachers' wages relative to other wages, and arrears in energy bills and teachers' wages). It is likely that temporary measures will only increase the eventual cost of adjustment and hurt education outcomes without addressing the main causes of the current fiscal crisis. (29)

RESISTANCE TO SYSTEMATIC CHANGE EFFORTS FROM THE WEST

Foreign investments and foreign advice appear to have grown significantly here since about 1994. For example, after the Asian Development bank did their major education study, they made available a huge loan for various improvement projects. They were then given a spacious office in the education ministry building right next to the Minister. Ostensibly this was done in order to improve communication between the Bank and the Ministry on how to access ADB monies for approved programs. In fact, this communication has fluctuated greatly this decade, depending upon who the minister of education was.

The current representative of the ADB, who has been in-country on various projects for a decade, now occupies this strategic office next to the Minister. He argues though that the previous minister rarely came to talk with him about potential collaborations on school improvement activities that the bank would

underwrite. Millions of dollars was approved for spending in Kyrgyzstan since 1996, but much remained unspent in 2001. Loans were available for preschool programs, textbook publishing, equipment and building maintenance, and distance learning/teacher retraining. But many of these dollars have not been borrowed, some programs are incomplete, and at least one proved quite controversial during the time of this research.

MM reported in an interview with me in March of 2001 that much of the ADB money for education is targeted at improving teacher skills, or investing in "human development" programs. He believed that there are many good teachers in national schools, but there has been "great resistance" to notions in the national ministry that "retraining" is required to carry out major school improvement objectives. Locals here firmly believe that the former Soviet education system was superior to that in any Western country, so what is there to learn from them now? In addition to uncertainty about exactly how or why teachers might need to be "retrained," by foreigners or using foreign ideas, there seemed to him three other general problems with why ADB money was not well used to date. All might be linked to Heyneman's previous construct of "structural anomalies."

On the one hand, many donor programs for improving Kyrgyz schools are targeted at the secondary schools, not higher education. However, ministers and deputy ministers here though (as in most former Soviet states), are academicians from universities and not familiar with issues or research in secondary education. Secondly, the typical pattern of dismissed Ministers of education is to be reassigned somewhere in higher education, very often as a university rector. Without ties to, previous interest in, nor future careers related to secondary education, enthusiasm for investing in such schools seems to be weak here at the national level. This is finally complicated by the fact that budgeted ADB monies are subject to loan agreements signed off through the Minister of Finance. An unenthusiastic Education Minister, coupled with a Finance Minister attempting to hold down inflationary growth in social programs, seems little conducive to major school reform efforts.

Lack of significant school reform efforts, according to MM, were time and legal anomalies in the Kyrgyz education system. On the one hand, education laws and decrees in Kyrgyzstan are often unclear, sometimes contradictory, and made independently by the legislature or president of the country. In higher

education for example, the president, for political reasons, has announced new universities in strategic parts of the country, which makes it hard for the education ministry to target such places for reform when they are under the "protection" of the president or other politicians. Also, there remain educational functions and training responsibilities in the country not under the supervision of the education ministry, but under other ministries. And the education ministry itself is unstable in terms of its internal structure. From the mid-1990s, the education ministry included "science" as one unit under its organizational control. In 2001 this unit was made functionally autonomous. And reshuffling *ministries* as well as *ministers* is typical here in Kyrgyzstan, as it is in other former Soviet states. Here again, structural instability in the system would seem to counter most efforts at long term coordination or "rationalization."

Rapid turnover and little planned changes have seemed a fact of life in the (now) Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Culture. New programs and policies are controlled from the top and come and go quickly; sometimes in the middle of the academic year. This is further compounded by the Ministry of Finance, which does not guarantee annual educational budget allotments until weeks before school begins. Neither do most government ministers control their own hiring and staffing domains. Subordinates are often reshuffled by the president or other powerful people either formally or informally. As a consequence, many ministers do not delegate autonomy to their own employees. Which also means that even mid-level administrative decisions are reserved by the ministers for when they can take the time to make them. The current Minister of Education and Culture is a highly public figure, as likely to be seen introducing an academic competition or on televised panel discussion as in her own office. She has also made three international trips totaling at least a month of her time in her first four months of office. In many cases, important educational decisions do not get made in Kyrgyzstan unless and until the Minister has the time to make them herself. Which is alleged to be her personal style, but also makes system rationality difficult in the eyes of foreigners.

According to MM, long term planning and shared decision-making are good ideas in the Kyrgyz republic, but in his experience this rarely happened in previous years, a fact he is hoping will improve with the new minister. International advisors are plentiful here in 2001, and can train locals in improved teaching strategies within the country. And money to underwrite many reforms is available through the

ADB as soon as some strategic planning and leadership can be found. He (and others) report they have been waiting for years for an education minister to be appointed that they could work with. And this person may have been appointed in January of 2001.

THE NEW MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE

SK became the new Minister of Education and Culture in the Kyrgyz Republic in January of 2001. She was invited just following a very controversial presidential election during a larger shake-up of national ministries. The nomination of SK was unusual in many ways: First, she is not a "scientist" in the way understood from Soviet times. Rather than a having the terminal degree in her field, she has a university teaching degree in English Philology. Second, although she was a university provost, she became a top-level administrator not in the public sector, but in the private one. She was clearly outside of the established circles of former educational leaders in the nation. In fact, she was able to initiate a new university and a new curriculum (based upon Western ideas) against the wishes and efforts of former education ministers. She helped to create this university (now American University in Kyrgyzstan) in 1993, and has been able to help acquire major American investment in its programs and faculty since that time.

SK has personally visited the United States on several occasions, and received high-ranking members of the US government in Kyrgyzstan over the past five years, including former Vice President Al Gore and then First Lady Hillary Clinton. She also visited the US in April of 2001, and met with the current US Secretary of Education. Education Secretary Rob Paige's photo sits on SK's bookcase now just under the Flag of the Kyrgyz Republic and (larger) picture of Askar Akaev, President of the Kyrgyzstan. SK has been extremely successful getting extramural dollars to fund AUK. Over 50% of its 2001 budget come from resources of either the US State Department or the Soros Foundation. AUK is reputed to have the largest budget and highest teaching salaries in the country at this time, and almost anyone in the Kyrgyz Republic acknowledges that SK was the major player in this situation.

SK and her efforts have thus clearly attracted the attention of the West in a country that has clearly been interested in being noticed. So maybe her effectiveness in dealing with America and obtaining international resources was the reason the president chose her to lead school reform in her country. There

were other rumors, though, about her ascendance into the position as minister of the MoEC. One was that it was really the president's wife who made the call to SK, offering her the position - which she declined. She was reportedly quite happy helping to run AUK. Only a second (some say a third and a forth) call from the President himself could convince her that she should change her mind. It *is* understood here that refusing the President would be a very poor career move. Some say that the president, an academician, was dismayed by the situation of the public universities in the country, and he hoped that SK would reform them. For whatever reason, SK was offered and did accept the post of national Minister of Education and Culture in January of 2001. And the new Minister quickly turned to former foreign allies of hers in requesting advice and assistance in making some major changes in the national education system.

CALLING FOR EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

MV, former Peace Corps volunteer and part-time teacher at AUK, and current contractor with USAID, has worked intermittently with SK over the years and has high praise for her work effort, values and energy. He knows that she has been very successful at importing US notions of higher education into the country, and claims that unlike the previous two ministers of education (at least), SK is a "person of action." He also agrees with MM that former education ministers were reluctant to take on significant reforms from the perspectives of foreign advisors, and argues that ministry officials working under previous heads were very conservative in acting without specific direction from the top. He believes that today, though, SK just might "pull off" some significant reforms in education with the help of foreigners and cooperative local officials.

In early February of 2001, the new Minister of Education and Culture asked the US Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic to call together the various American education experts from around the country for a brainstorming session. The Ambassador suggested that this discussion group might meet at his house for a catered lunch. On February 20, a ninety-minute conversation was held at Ambassador's house. Present were representatives from USAID, the Peace Corps, the Fulbright Program, ACCELS, and several US funded NGOs working at the community level throughout the country. Several Embassy staff members, including the ambassador were also active participants among the 12 who came. Although there were several Kyrgyz citizens at the session, there was no one else from the national Ministry of Education.

The Minister's interests were very clear, and she spoke at length about them at the lunch. All invitees had been asked to bring prepared remarks about what we thought should be aims and strategies for improving Kyrgyz schools. In fact, SK had a long list herself and proceeded to tell us what she thought the problems were that we could help her to solve. As Americans working in local schools, she argued that we had to have good ideas for improving Kyrgyz schools. She had been to America and had seen schools that worked. Therefore, we obviously could quickly contribute to her reform agenda.

SK proclaimed that there were serious problems in the country in both higher education and secondary education. She feared that corruption in universities was weakening the value of diplomas, and that there were too many specialties not related to current social and economic needs in the nation. She worried that higher education budgets were being drained to train too many students on too few dollars (soms) compared to national needs. She feared that a great amount of public funds as well as private tuition payments of some university students were finding their way into university administrative pockets since there was no "transparency" in university budgets. For these reasons (and maybe more), she seemed to have already decided that some universities needed to be closed or merged, and that a new governing board of trustees, as in American universities, needed to be constructed to control duplication and corruption.

She then moved to secondary education. There too, she suggested, public school directors were taking additional school payments without accounting for them. It seemed also that budget dollars coming from the national ministry channeled through the regional school ministries was being drained off for non-educational purposes. On both accounts, budget transparency was required and hopefully the Americans could help her accomplish this. Teacher quality and pay were also expressed concerns by SK. She retold the story of getting letters from teachers working for 290 soms (about $6) a month and not being able to feed their families. This had to stop; and maybe cost savings from higher education closures and budget transparencies could come to the aid of desperate schools, particularly those in the rural parts of the nation.

Unfortunately, by the time SK finished explaining her needs and ideas, our meeting time was virtually over. MV had brought a long letter detailing how teacher retraining could be accomplished under the right conditions; local NGO representatives urged SK to bring into school reform discussions local

communities and parents who in their areas seemed out of the communication loops with local schools; and a USAID-funded university teacher opined that reorganizing any and all business education curricula in the nation was essential. But the rest of us had no time to comment. It was agreed that those of us who could would reconvene for more discussions as soon as possible.

Three days later, on February 23, another and smaller group reconvened at the request of SK for further discussion. We included two representatives from the ADB, two working on subcontracts from USAID and myself. The Minister's appeal was the same as three days before: how to help her reform the educational system with international ideas and assistance. She opined that there was very little time to waste, and that if something was going to be done, she/we had to act quickly. She argued again that cutting higher education budgets was necessary for both quality issues and cost savings that could be directed to secondary education. She expressed great interest in knowing how foreign experts could help her construct a transparent budget system; help develop some policy for identifying students truly in need of higher education assistance (since parental income data are very unreliable in this cash-based economy); and she wondered if anyone could help her with the parliament's (Jogorku Kenesh) "meddling" in the affairs of the MoEC. She also complained that after-school programs (inherited from Soviet times) were costly and diverted attention on academic subjects that were needed today; and that she wanted some of the advances achieved in her university to become implemented in whatever universities would remain after we helped her decide how to close the rest of them.

The foreigners had several sorts of advice. MA, an Australian national, reminded the Minister that he was already working on a new budgetary review process for the Ministry of Finance that had implications for her ministry, and indicated to all of us that he had been asked by USAID to represent them in reform discussions, with her permission. The senior (visiting) ADB representative reminded the minister that their earlier study had made some points similar to hers with regard to cost savings in higher education and elsewhere. Discontinue public funding for most universities since the ADB study found that demand for higher education was high enough to sustain universities without public assistance; consolidate many of the smaller rural schools as they were no longer cost effective; and discontinue looking to the Russian Federation for school reform ideas. It was time for the Kyrgyz Republic to develop

local curricular standards based upon the needs of this republic rather than to keep depending upon "the Russian Standard" as the usual strategy for reforming education here. This latter suggestion was particularly ironic as the Minister announced that she was off the next day to a meeting of Education Ministers from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to share school improvement ideas.

Perhaps a former Peace Corps volunteer, then under subcontract also to USAID made the most critical observation of the day. He was insistent that any meaningful changes in school policy in Kyrgyzstan would have to come not from the foreigners, but needed "buy-in" from local school and ministry officials. Several of the foreigners agreed that the strategy for so-doing was to call together a representative group for brainstorming and agenda setting as was typically done in the West. At least equal participation of foreigners and locals would be needed for this process. SK indicated that she had never been in such a session nor seen one in action. But, if we were in favor of such a process, then she would be happy to cooperate. We urged her to set a time and invite a representative group. This meeting was then set for 5 PM on March 9, 2001.

PARTICPANTS AND PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The MoEC reform committee "Brainstorming Discussion" was convened the afternoon of March 9, 2001. In attendance in the Minister's large conference room were 41 people, counting stragglers. Of these, 10 were foreigners who mostly represented external donor organizations, the rest "locals" of one sort or another. About one-third of the locals, upon introductions, were either translators or employees of "donor" organizations working in Kyrgyz schools and/or communities. There were three secondary school directors; one a Turkish school director. Turkey has had a significant presence in private schools and universities here this decade, funding dozens of secondary schools and universities nationwide. In addition, there were three university rectors and several deans and other higher education administrators. There were also four ministry representatives, the Minister herself, and a special USAID "facilitator" to run the meeting. There were no "rank and file" schoolteachers in attendance, nor would there be much participation by lower ranking ministry officials or university faculty in discussions.

The "brainstorming" meeting went perhaps as well as could be expected, considering none of the "locals" had ever seen one before. The task, it was explained, was to have everyone in the room suggest

what from their perspective (working in Kyrgyz education) was an important problem that required attention. Two languages were primarily used in the meeting, Russian and English. The Turkish representative spoke only Turkish and had his own interpreter. Other interpreters were provided by USAID. SK needed no interpreter: she speaks three languages herself. There were several heated exchanges between participants (mostly locals) who objected to one or another claim related to some problem. The facilitator (with encouragement) explained that this session was not for solving problems or really discussing them. This would come later. Our task was to create a master list for further action. Ninety minutes later, to make a long story short, we had produced a list of 74 problems or areas of concern. Thirty-four of these were identified as primarily related to secondary education, 24 related to higher education, and 16 about the organization of the republican education ministry. The meeting was then adjourned, and a group of eight volunteers (including myself) agreed to meet on March 13 to review and categorize the list.

MF, on subcontract to work on accounting rationalization within the Ministry of Finance, had by now been formally asked by USAID to coordinate the educational reform discussion groups. According to him, the US Ambassador had called the USAID head and informed him that since the current Minister of education was pro-school reform and was well known to the American community, then the US should be backing her efforts as much as possible. He in effect became the "point" person for the foreigners, and he took on the lead role in reviewing and categorizing the long list produced on March 9. By the time of our March 3 meeting, a draft or what the issues were was available for us to see, and we quickly agreed we could go back to the larger group for the next discussion.

Seven days later, the larger group reconvened to read and hear about how the foreigners (mostly) had synthesized their problems and issues. Approximately 90% of the attendees were the same as before. SK thanked everyone for coming, and suggested that she would next involve national legislators in the process. She also urged speed in our considerations, as she wanted to put into practice as many changes as possible for the upcoming school year, which at this point was only six months away. MF reminded the group that this was to remain a friendly conversation, and that after the category list was presented and reviewed, discussions could ensue and study teams would be constituted to debate the items and to work on

suggestions for addressing those that groups found most important. MF suggested that to us there appeared several ways to summarize the long list of problems identified the previous week. Before we got started, however, a new visitor on contract to USAID involved in curriculum reform in higher education in Kazakhstan complained about the process. He argued that since many reforms would demand Parliament considerations, the process we were now following was premature and should be restarted with their participation. Several in the group countered that if SK wanted changes in six months, we could not afford to restart this business as it would set back the advisory role of those in attendance until almost summer. The latter argument won the day. I also wondered out loud about the Asian Development Bank and its lack of presence in group problem setting and discussion. I understood from reading several of their reports that they had studied and developed some action plans in the Republic. One staff member of a distance learning project ADB was developing did announce her presence, but said only that they would be more active later in the process.

In general, the substance of the long "problems" list constructed on March 9 dwelt mostly on issues of school finance, school management, and academic substance and content. As such, they could either be considered by school level, or by focus. For example, corruption in universities and corruption in secondary schools could be considered either under the notion of corruption, or under higher education as opposed to secondary education. Or, academic standards and academic freedom were both identified for higher education and for secondary education. The general consensus emerged as indicated before, that working groups should be constituted by major interest, which later tended to coincide with school level. The list of 74 topics was collapsed into 8 topical areas: minimum academic standards, teacher retraining, new technologies, school management, use of data, higher education rationalization, higher education funding, and organization of the national ministry of education. At that time, a young local woman who had recently returned with an MA degree in Management was presented to the group as under contract with USAID to help manage and organize the reports and documents that the new working groups would develop. A list was passed around the room and attendees were asked to sign up for which of the working groups they wanted to work in, and we were told that AI would contact us quickly about meetings of each group.

Eight working groups proved unworkable almost from the start. The forty or so original members of the group could not be spread out over this many discussions, considering that the minister wanted results fast, which implied weekly meetings that working people had difficulty getting to on their schedules. Besides, AI could not serve as organizer, interpreter, advisor, and secretary and document producer for all eight groups at the same time. Some discussions I participated in before team reorganization took place were informative and likely related to general systemic problems. For instance, one early discussion over academic standards involved both secondary and higher education representatives. A deputy minister of education responsible for secondary schools indicated frustration in joint talks with higher education group members on academic standards issues. She complained about the great gulf between the university and the secondary schools. Learner characteristics were never in the minds of the university, and this lack of interest was clearly visible in the few books produced by universities for secondary schools. Professors in higher education paid almost no attention to children's needs in producing new materials for schools when they wrote, which is critical in Kyrgyzstan since there are few other ostensible experts to do such writing. Lacking much perceived interest or understanding of secondary school issues among the attending university rectors, she preferred to move to minimum standards discussions with foreigners working in the country rather than with domestic university people.

In later conversations it seemed clear that there were very few people in the MoEC or in our working groups who had ever developed a specialization in curriculum content or alignment issues. The curriculum was historically delivered from Moscow, and in later talks about this matter no one ever volunteered that reinvestigating the remaining core curriculum or attempting to match the secondary school curriculum to what would be required in the university later has ever been considered in the MoEC. The only working group participants who proclaimed curricular specializations were attendees from the Kyrgyz Institute of Education (KIE). This group was once fairly important in the training and retraining of teachers, developing new curricular materials, and performing various education studies. In effect, though, KIE was no longer integrated into MoEC policy formation on curricular issues, they were under-funded, and they reported to other ministries besides the MoEC. KIE participants announced that they were psychologists who worked mostly with instructional strategies for difficult children: i.e., fitting difficult

children to the required curriculum, not investigating and evaluating the reason for the curriculum itself or problems with its delivery for "normal" children. For various reasons, representatives from most donor groups involved in the working groups viewed the KIE as irrelevant to the school reforms they had in mind.

The primary curricular changes controlled by the MoEC this decade have involved new allowances for regional variation (teaching local ethnic history) and increased preparation in Kyrgyz, the native language of the Kyrgyz Republic. Regionalism is a critical issue here as ethnic Uzbeks actually outnumber Kyrgyz in the south of the country. But all curriculum decisions here have in essence been declared by the parliament or borrowed from the Russian Federation, not deliberated upon or announced by the national ministry of education. I also learned from my own faculty assignment in the national pedagogical university that curriculum and instruction specializations (based upon child pedagogy or any western-style management theories) are not taught here, which was reflected in the lack of such expertise in the national ministry. While there are locally strong and committed school directors and teachers in the republic, there never has been here any powerful intellectual school reformer whose theoretical or empirical discoveries have influenced national school policy. Moscow remains the primary intellectual source of school reform ideas according to all my sources.

There were no regular attendees in our working groups from the ranks of practicing teachers in the Kyrgyz Republic, or faculty from any of the pedagogical universities or institutes. Neither did the Minister of Education and Culture attach any in-house staff to this six-month project. SK either did not have, did not trust, or for whatever other reason did not provide staff for the working groups. She did support our efforts by issuing a formal order (signed and sealed) for all employees of the MoEC to cooperate with AI in her information requests, and proclaimed in public meetings (and on TV) that this important process aided by foreigners was ongoing. It is also true that many staff from different MoEC departments came to report-in to the ADB office where AI worked full-time to coordinate and synthesize findings and plans of the study teams. Thus, there was positive evidence that this undertaking was seen as important to the ministry. But most of the actual document production and typing etc. was left to foreign volunteers and/or to those working under USIA and ADB contracts.

By the second week of group work the original eight groups had been reorganized into four. Four of the eight original groups seemed most interested in secondary education issues, and they were combined into two new ones: School Management and Minimum Standards (SMMS), and Teacher Retraining and New Technologies (TRNT). The higher education representatives had been clearly more interested in academic freedom (from the MoEC) than about setting standards, and almost all dropped out of any secondary school discussion groups. Management of schools and minimum academic standards were thus merged and became the site of some foreign involvement and much MoEC participation. As well, the teacher retraining and new technologies groups were combined. Here were the majority of foreigners, as many of them had programs involved in internationally funded teacher training and retraining.

Two groups were originally to focus upon higher education topics: funding and rationalization. Volunteers to study and recommend in these groups were almost all university rectors and several foreigners. The idea of "rationalizing" higher education of course was not their idea, but one expressed by the Minister herself and seconded in various bank reports previously cited. It had been made clear to all present in the first group meeting that SK intended to merge and/or close many public universities in order to end program duplication and to save money that she might spend on secondary programs. The university rector-dominated groups were combined into one and ended up becoming very resistant to the reforms that would be proposed by foreigners in that working group. An additional group was to focus upon internal restructuring issues of the Ministry of Education and Culture itself, and a last group was supposed to discuss matters of data collection and use in Kyrgyz education. As it turns out, these two groups became redundant, as another independent study had been formed by the United Nations Development Programme. This group ostensibly outranked the one we formed. At the conclusion of that panel's work, though, SK asked for review of their proposals by our "reform team." This may have been just as well since the task of recommending changes in the national ministry may have been too close to home: few locals at all had volunteered to be on that group!

COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING GROUPS

The remainder of this paper is dedicated to describing procedures, dynamics and recommendations of two of the four working groups previously discussed: SMMS and TRNT. Each of

these groups met (on average) bi-weekly for four months between March and early June, 2001. Each group, whose memberships sometimes overlapped, produced a multi-paged final report submitted to SK, the Minister of Education and Culture in the Kyrgyz Republic in early June, 2001. The TRNT group was the larger of the two, as many of its members were from specific donor organizations already providing curricular and/or youth services in the Kyrgyz Republic. Many of these foreigners were already well known by SK. The formal list of the TRNT group contained 36 names: 9 Westerners representing donor groups (e.g., the Soros Foundation, Peace Corps, Save the Children, etc.); 12 Kyrgyz nationals serving either as agents of the donor organizations or as translators; 3 faculty or staff members from American University Kyrgyzstan; 1 Turkish school director; 3 university rectors; 2 representatives from the Kyrgyz Institute of Education; and 6 members who identified themselves as staff of the national MoEC. In subsequent meetings this larger list fluctuated greatly, but foreigners and their agents always exceeded other constituents in attendance. Most higher education representatives completely dropped out of later group meetings, and the final discussions among the TRNT group in mid-May were numerically and verbally dominated by foreigners/donors.

Teacher retraining in the Kyrgyz Republic equates to "professional development" in the West, and involves the notion of continual upgrading of teaching skills and methods among practitioners. Most former Soviet education systems developed five-year requirements for teachers to return to national or regional teacher training summer programs for learning of new materials and/or methods of teaching. Kyrgyzstan had such a system and LP, deputy education minister uncovered and reported to the TRNT group the organization and impact of teacher retraining in the republic during the 1990s. The general trend had become serious in her eyes since about 1994, when only about 50 percent of teachers officially required to be retrained could be provided for. Much of this was due to the inability of the KIE to organize regional retraining for lack of any budget. Understaffed and underpaid (as were the teachers), KIE had lost it's centrality in the MoEC organizational chart. Also problematic was the fact that teachers remaining in the system were aging quickly. LP, who toured the US in a State Department exchange program in the Fall of 2000, reported that most practicing teachers in the Kyrgyz Republic had been prepared during Soviet times, as their average age was between 45 and 50. Also, we were reminded, there were few, if any,

new materials to give to teachers during their professional development. Few texts in Kyrgyz had been prepared, and many teachers were still using books from the Soviet era in class. LP suggested, and the donor representatives agreed, that new teaching ideas and technologies were important in the nation's schools, but there were few in the MoEC who could provide them. Several donor representatives also argued that there was little incentive for teachers to undergo almost any retraining anyway since they had to pay their own expenses to travel and attend workshops/institutes in larger cities and towns where housing and amenities were lacking.

In group discussions there were several competing ideas about how to improve and restore teacher training and retraining. Teacher training was less focused upon, partly as it was assumed that higher education reform might focus upon this, partly because there was concern (especially among the donor groups) that Kyrgyz schools were in crisis now, and could not await gradual changes via higher education reforms. KIE representatives, predictably, argued that they could do the job if and when they received higher budgetary allowances. Foreigners challenged this notion, echoing the long-held Westerners critique of Soviet and post-Soviet teaching methods as too text- and teacher- dominated. They doubted that KIE organized retraining programs had any new technologies to use or methods to teach, but would rather use university subject-matter specialists still lecturing on outdated content and using old materials. So too, they argued, the old organization of teacher institutes - where practitioners had to leave their own villages and towns to travel to distant places with no stipend - was not a good way to entice or attract the very conservative and needy teachers that should be the targets for retraining.

There were two other strategies in actual or proposed teacher retraining around the country which were discussed and provided counterpoints to restoring the KIE's dominance of Kyrgyz teacher retraining. One involved many/most of the donor organizations represented in the group. Each organization had in-field volunteers/interns/advisors involved in teaching or coaching or advising in curricular areas of need. Many of these were involved in teaching English in some format or venue throughout the republic, as this foreign language has been either incorporated or proposed for the curriculum of most secondary schools in Kyrgyzstan. Soviet schools were always involved with compulsory foreign language instruction, and English today appears to be the foreign language in most demand. Donor representatives at TRNT

meetings represented hundreds of Western-inspired or trained teachers and/or volunteers working in hundreds of schools impacting upon thousands of students and local teachers. Their efforts had always either been encouraged or tolerated by previous education ministry leaders, especially as they were no-cost additions to existing programs.

The Soros Foundation had perhaps the longest and most impressive reputation among the donor groups, and it had a regional dissemination model that would later be suggested as one that the MoEC could borrow and extend. Literally thousands of local teachers have been involved in its programs since 1993. Among its several specifically education programs in Kyrgyzstan are Debate, English Language, Step by Step and Critical thinking. Soros has 5 resource centers in the 7 oblasts of Kyrgyzstan, a major program site in Bishkek, and dozens of "pilot" secondary schools whose missions are to reach out into the countryside to demonstrate new teaching methodologies to practicing school teachers and directors in each of the four programs (and others) of the Soros Foundation. Importantly, each of the SOROS programs is targeted at reforming the way teaching is done in the former Soviet republics, and takes aim at the very sorts of pedagogical retraining historically undertaken by the KIE.

"Critical Thinking" is a well-advertised program in Bishkek, capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. Its agents (via Soros) are working in higher education as well as secondary schools, and its implicit aim is to reform all teaching styles in Kyrgyz schools and universities. AUK, the Minister's own school, also has a "Critical thinking" Laboratory and its leaders/teachers were among the participants of the TRNT group. The Step by Step program, also supported by Soros, even more centrally challenges the former Soviet philosophy and style of teaching, and proposes to create active family involvement in the schools. Facilitating parent decision making and participation in their children's education (as equals with teachers) was never part of the Soviet schooling model. The aims of both these Soros Foundation programs are outlined in locally available materials:

> The Reading and Writing for Critical thinking Program (RWCT) is based upon the idea that democratic practices in schools play an important role in the transition toward more open societies. ... These methods are designed to help students think reflectively, take ownership for their personal learning, understand the logic of arguments, listen attentively, debate confidently and become independent, life-long learners. ...The Step by Step program, ... promotes the progress of reform in the system of education. ... (It) is based on modern theories of child

development (L. Vigotsky, J.J. Piaget, E. Erikson), which proposes creation of a child-centered academic environment, and active family involvement. (29)

In essence, the TRNT group agreed that there were major problems with the existing professional development programs of the republic, but disagreed about how to remedy them. (30) Donor agencies carried with them child-centered and parent involvement notions about schooling that they were convinced should be incorporated into any improved system. KIE representatives were convinced that they could do the job if their budgets and status were reconstructed. There was also the matter of program delivery to rural teachers. KIE representatives were convinced that city teachers were the best, and that rural teachers needed to come to larger centers for training. Peace Corps, Soros and other representatives argued for moving the training as close to rural schools as possible, using the Soros Centers and pilot schools model. It was even suggested that the MoEC might take over or co-operate with Soros in running these resource centers since Soros was beginning to diminish some of its educational programs in favor of others designed for adults.

Another controversial matter arose as several staff members of a new ADB retraining program explained its background and workings. This one million dollar "distance learning" program had been approved by a previous education minister in collaboration with the Bank during the mid-1990s. It involved computers, satellite dishes, monitors, and various sorts of expensive software applications. Much of the work was subcontracted or coordinated by one of the national universities that a former deputy minister of education was now the rector of, and other universities were to provide program staff (if and when there was money for them). The foreigners suspected collusion; but they voiced genuine concern as to how distance learning run by non-experts in new teaching methodologies could be helpful. They reviewed the program budget and found little there for the distance center staffs, and no job descriptions that suggested any competence in teacher pedagogy or new teaching methodologies. Given that SK was not actively involved in this project, nor that the Minister of Finance was generally predisposed to approve new expenditures in education even if they were in collaboration with the ADB, it seemed unlikely that anything beyond equipment would be available for teacher retraining via this avenue. This was all in addition to the experience of donor organization representatives who did not see how this program

addressed motivational issues for teachers. Nor did the plan take into account the routine lack of heat and electricity in the countryside that would likely also plague retraining centers dependent upon both.

Five members of the TRNT group formally challenged the final group report, arguing that it underestimated their displeasure at this prospect for future teacher retraining. In essence, the smaller, more decentralized and volunteer-based organizations were disagreeing with the bank-approved high technology project now taken over by a quasi-independent group in the MoEC. MM reminded other group members, after reading the letter below, that the distance learning project was no longer the "ADB" project, but now the project of the MoEC. The group opined (in part):

> … there should a slight shift in conceptual approach to this project. The ADB Plan focuses on "Distance Learning" as the main thrust of the Project when in fact distance learning should be a sector under the larger umbrella of "Teacher Training and New Technologies." It seems that many important questions, such as course needs and development, appear to be unresolved. In further development of the Project, the working group recommends that ADB keep in mind (that): 1) A thorough **needs-assessment** should be conducted in the regions where training centers are located to get teacher input on course structure and content. This can be facilitated by either international consultants or professional local specialists trained in the participatory technologies of community needs assessment; …2) **(use of) Existing Resources should be rationalized:** SOROS and others have already established and institutionalized resource centers throughout the country and have trained significant numbers of human resources. MOE working group recommends that ADB utilize them, building upon the strong foundations that have been laid. Alternative sites should be considered to the university bases, especially if we are talking about teacher training for Secondary Educators. If not, these human resources should at least be included the planning and development stages of this project from here forward. 3) Focus more on **developing "cadres"** necessary to complete projects: identify team leaders, trainers: responsible parties who will coordinate efforts at all levels. The questions of physical space and structure will fall into place afterwards. This point is tightly connected with # 2 & 3. (Also there should be) 4) **More Transparency in Project Implementation**: ADB should open up the Project to the working group already working on Teacher Training and New technologies. ADB "business plans" and other information should be accessible to working group partners and other interested parties. ADB should welcome input from the MOE working group. (31)

The TRNT working group finished its final report in late May, and most of its recommendations have been suggested. It argued that the ministry needed to somehow reinvigorate the program with new resources, to refocus retraining on more child and family-centered technologies, and to reintegrate teacher retraining somehow back into the organizational chart in the MoEC under the rubric of a "human resource development division." It suggested using and adapting the methods and techniques already available to children of the republic via donor organizations, and even using foreign donor groups and their programs as part of the official retraining activities of the MoEC. It urged the creation of regional resource centers,

perhaps even taking over and staffing existing Soros Centers. It urged active assessment of the stock of teaching skills in the nation today as precursor to creating new programs, and it urged the creation of a professional steering committee to oversea program administration. It also argued that external donor groups might serve as advisors on the steering committee and in the seven resource centers (and smaller raion centers) it proposed. There were 19 proposals in all in the final document, and a timeline that ran to year 2005 in its implementation. Nowhere in the final list was there specific mention of where the Kyrgyz Education Institute would play a significant role in any of these reforms.

Conversations, deliberations and proposals of the SMMS group ended up being even more contentious than those of the TRNT, probably because the group composition was more heavily weighted with locals as opposed to foreigners, and the foreigners in this case were not necessarily donors. Six foreigners, seven locals in foreign employ, five school principals or school staff, two members from the Kyrgyz Institute of Education and four MoEC representatives were involved in the meetings, although usually in fewer numbers than the total number who appeared on the list. From the initial list of 74 issues and problems in the Kyrgyz republic, 20 were reconfigured into secondary school issues for study, and fifteen more-or-less became the focus of the SMMS group (several overlapping with interests of TRNT). Some among the "problems" identified and handed to the SMMS group for discussion were really informational items that needed clarification for the foreigners. Discussions indicated some of them were very unfamiliar with the inherited organization of schools in Kyrgyzstan, and confusion they had in reading/interpreting how the system operated. One or more of the foreigners lacked understanding of schooling levels in the county, how examinations are done here, who pays for schooling, how students proceed into higher education from the secondary schools, and instructional language questions. Each of these "problems" had/has an answer that locals understood and explained. Some of the answers disappointed the foreigners (like the examination system), and they ended up being targeted for "reform" in the final document.

For example, primary schooling is from grades 1-4, middle school from grades 5-9, and higher (secondary) is grades 10 and 11 here (in 2000-2001). Several foreigners on the committee expressed interest but no opinion on this matter except to wonder how the grade configurations got organized in such

a fashion, to which there was never much of an answer. This issue became interesting in two April meetings because recently the Russian Federation announced that it was going to a 12 year school plan, and the former minister of education in Kyrgyzstan agreed that his country too would join this trend. Foreigners expressed concern that a country with such a poor educational infrastructure and such few resources could not even successfully school students now in the eleven year plan, yet here was some perhaps binding agreement to move to yet another year of schooling that could not be paid for. Their (our) question emerged: is there any reason to have serious talks on school restructuring in the Kyrgyz Republic when external policies from Russia are announced which seem to find reflexive approval in Kyrgyzstan without debate? This irony was noted by a deputy education minister who suggested that in her view, Kyrgyzstan had the autonomy to pursue perhaps a 9 year minimum required curriculum and a 3 year user-fee based plan that might make up the twelve year plan.

There *were* a number of substantive issues among the working group that could not be reduced to information exchange. For example, several identified problems from the original problem list identified school building management concerns. The education language of almost all former soviet republics, including Kyrgyzstan involves "decentralization." Decentralization here though was confusing to the foreigners and somewhat problematic also to the locals. Budgets for local schools are composed of resources from the national ministry (mostly for teacher salaries), and budgets from regional governments (raions and oblasts). Yet, no level of government has actually honored its financial obligations in a timely way since the early 1990s. And, all monies from the ministries have to be specified the year before allocations are promised. This means that if there is a building emergency (e.g., a water pipe breaks and it ruins the floor or walls of a building), there is no budgeted money for repairs until the next school year. School directors (principals) often offset this problem by charging yearly fees for all students (160 soms, or about $3). But all of these transactions are done in cash, and there are no formal records of expenditures, etc. which foreigners found hard to accept. There are no real accounting procedures for schools or school directors. Neither, as it turns out, are there formal requirements for becoming a school leader, fiscal or curricular. Nor do school principals get formal training in staff management or new pedagogical techniques.

Both local members and most foreigners of the SMMS team agreed that new strategies for teaching, new educational technologies, and fiscal decentralization of schools implied that school directors needed special training and new preparation or retraining programs. And several in the group argued that during Soviet times such trainings could have been achieved as director preparation was done under the Kyrgyz Education Institute. But such programs had all but disappeared in the 1990s. And what was worse, locals suggested, was that school principals and directors in many rural regions of the country were no longer even really chosen by local school authorities. Kyrgyz notions of devolving school decision-making had enabled akims (mayors) of many small towns to become involved in hiring of school directors. This was problem for the all foreign members of the SMMS group since there were no formal job descriptions or role specifications for being a school principal, and even a problem for locals as non-educators were now involved in the placement of directors. It seemed problematic to all that school reform at the local level could be achieved under this plan of "decentralization." Also, since there remained little financial accountability or budget transparency in school funding at the building level, it was suspected that corruption and bribery might be maintained by this particular interpretation of local school control. These concerns ended up being targeted in group recommendations for reform.

The SMMS met for its final time to consider a draft of its final report the week of June 4, 2001. This report had been compiled by MA and appeared to reflect mostly opinions of the foreigners most active in the group. It overviewed the charge of the group, provided school statistics available from the MoEC, described issues in the organization of schools (typically from foreigner perspectives), and then issued a list of 14 recommendations for reforming the system. (32) The Minister had expressed great interest in seeing this list and hoped that she could use ideas from it in her upcoming meeting with the other education ministers from CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries who were coming to Bishkek for a regional meting on June 12 and 13, 2001. She claimed that she wanted to portray Kyrgyzstan as proactive in the area of educational reform, and wanted to talk about her plans, which would be partly derived from our work. But the list promised her before the final SMMS meeting did not arrive intact. Locals in the last group meeting refuted a number of its proposals.

Five of the 14 recommendations involved rethinking the content and duration of schooling in Kyrgyzstan. The draft report argued that the country needed to reinvestigate what it was teaching, and for how long students should go to school. It specifically took issue with increasing the years of compulsory schooling from 11 to 12 just because the Russian Federation announced that is was doing that. The draft report argued against re-instituting public kindergartens, and suggested devoting more resources to grades 1-9 education from resources previously dedicated to grades 10 and 11. The report also suggested that grades 10 and 11 be made optional and tuition based, and urged the MoEC to develop a scheme to financially assist low-income students who wanted to continue into these latter two grades.

The report also argued that devolution of school control to the building level would be a good idea, providing that the criteria for principal selection was made clear and subject to the MoEC rather than remaining partly with local non-school government officials. Hiring guidelines and training in leadership strategies, finance and accountability needed to be achieved first in order to do this. School councils also ought to be formed to provide some oversight to education according to the final report, which would give parents the right to provide input into schooling rather than being the target of teachers as it had been during Soviet times. Fiscal transparency would also be required to empower parents the ability to see what was happening with their school dollars (soms). The larger issue of school corruption was also targeted in the recommendations of the SMMS group. "Teachers and principals should be prohibited from accepting money directly from students beyond that allowed by law. Periodic confidential surveys should be undertaken of parents and students to identify such instances," and in cases of reported corruption " (their) employment should be immediately terminated and prosecution action commenced." Not mentioned in the report were how anti-corruption procedures might themselves be safeguarded: at least one university rector this decade had lost his job for just such an attempt.

Two other recommendations in the list of 14 identified the organizational issues with school reform here: how schools interface with other ministries and the government. One recommendation was that before major reforms to produce a more rational and efficient system were put into practice, that the MoEC needed to get agreement from the Ministry of Finance that monies saved from education changes could be retained within the education ministry rather than being returned to the general budget. Also, it

was recognized that a number of the reforms that working groups were proposing actually violated national law in the Kyrgyz Republic. The final draft recommendation of the SMMS working group was that education law needed to be changed to allow for the proposals made.

All three senior local members on the SMMS committee (two from the MoEC, one from the KIE) objected to one or more aspects of the final report. LP argued that although the work of the foreigners had been impressive, there were some mistakes in the UNESCO data used to describe system weaknesses. She also suggested that not enough focus on primary education was included in the report, and she disagreed that the Kyrgyz Republic ought to abandon pre-school education just because there did not appear to be enough money to pay for it. She also expressed some disappointment that actual requirements for principals was not in the report yet, and opined that principals ought to actually be involved in classroom teaching and not just administrators. Another senior staff member from the MoEC also amplified these sentiments. She lectured the group on how the Soviet preschool had been the pride of the Union, and how it also liberated women from household work. She argued that if there were no funds in the MoEC budget, then other ministry budgets needed to be attached, or ADB funds might be applied for. But surely, this group ought not to suggest that abandoning preschool education was desirable or even necessary. MA, report author and still chair of the committee, responded that he would soften some of the report recommendations as he could, arguing that he/we were only making suggestions with an eye to resources.

The concept of opening up and studying what minimum education standards the country really needed now drew comments from LP and myself. She argued that minimum standards ought to be a construct free from any discussion of resources. No one challenged her on this claim. I asked the question about when, if ever, there had been a serious national debate or analysis since independence of what ought to constitute the basic curriculum in Kyrgystan. LP said that in 1997 the Soros Foundation had a conference on this matter, and that the ministry at that time constructed a year 2025 curriculum plan. She seemed to think that this was a serious answer to my question. The draft report actually though drew the greatest ire of the attending deputy director of the KIE. He argued that his staff routinely worked on matters of the curriculum. He also challenged the idea that the study group would suggest retrenching to accept a nine-year minimum standard plan instead of moving ahead to a twelve-year plan. He said that

Kyrgyz schools already could not teach what was required in eleven years. To the foreigners, the notion of trying to prioritize what could be taught, and with what resources it could be done, seemed only logical. To the KIE representative, this logic was completely missing. Since the logic of pairing goals with resources yet appeared to elude (or not be important) to the KIE representative, and since the hour was late, this matter was not pursued further. MA thanked all members for their weeks of work on this project and indicated that he would do the best he could to revisit the 14 suggestions and note where and when disagreements had emerged in the final meeting.

DISCUSSION

The limits of this paper are various, and among them are what it can "prove" about either the theory or practice of schooling in Kyrgyzstan. The aim descriptive and analytic in the ethnographic sense, rather than to be theoretical or prescriptive. While there are dozens of donor agency and bank reports that describe and prescribe school reforms for the various CIS states, there is virtually nothing in the academic literature on how local school officials confront and ideologically resist or try to reshape the waves of foreign "reformers" who have descended en masse. Neither the Sovietologists nor the comparative educators have described what is or has happened here. The conceptual journey here began with a literature review from the early twentieth century, and concluded with a powerful contemporary education reform "event" at the beginning of the next century. The hope is that those coming to live and work here in the future will have as a result of my efforts some guide to understand the multiple views and voices surrounding school post-Soviet school reform that has beforehand been unavailable in Kyrgyzstan.

There are in addition the obvious methodological issues involved with ethnographic work of any kind. All qualitative work of course depends upon the "lense" of the viewer and his/her conceptual organization. I chose early-on in this work to cast the dynamics I was witnessing into a "foreigners versus locals" perspective, partly because this is a main perspective in education/economic development literature, but mostly because this emerged as a primary theme in many of the interactions between "us and them" in this case study. This research can thus be challenged in various ways. Were enough people interviewed? Was enough supportive documentation collected to supplement observations and interviews? Did I start in the right place with the right people? Was I sympathetic enough to local interpretations of

schooling and its significant accomplishments prior to the demise of the USSR? Did I have enough interchange and did I get enough interpretative feedback from my "key informants?" Only the reader can ultimately judge the answers to such questions.

General weaknesses regarding audiences and methods being acknowledged, this research has some particular issues. The problem with performing a case study of ongoing school reform (or discussions of reform) is that there is never a real stopping point. As the final four reports (two of which were discussed here) were being submitted in mid-June, 2001, other events were yet occurring that related to the six-month strategic planning activities I described. Some of these events seemed positive. Foreigners were encouraged to hear that the "Soviet-style" director of the KIE was retiring soon, and they hoped his replacement would be more receptive to donor ideas regarding curriculum and pedagogy than he had been. Also, SK was having meetings with the Minister of Finance on how much money she might be able to keep if and when reforms she desired were implemented; she was also involved with locals and (other) foreigners in rewriting the law on education. In mid-June, it was too soon to tell what would eventually come from these conversations – especially since other ministries were likely having similar ones that might compete with the interests of the MoEC. Also, a very important CIS education ministers' meeting (of twelve countries) was to be held here June 12 and 13. SK proclaimed that it would be a large stage for presenting her national education reform ideas. She told us that she would be using ideas given her by the working groups in much of her presentation. We were asked to suggest an outline for it.

On the other hand, some of the other summer events surrounding the MoEC and school reform momentum seemed either redundant or confusing. For example, our group learned only in June that SK had also formed another group from her university to duplicate much of our discussions, without connecting our groups to theirs. She also asked some former colleagues at AUK to develop her speech on school reform for the CIS conference, and asked us to share our reports with them just days before the meeting. Was this just an effort to get independent ideas into the mix, or did it represent some lack of trust in our group since few of us were on her established team from years before? Surely it would be difficult for these local professors to grasp the implications of some of the foreign-inspired reforms. They were mostly local university faculty trained under the old system, and without specific secondary school

experience. The general theme of the CIS conference was also of some concern. Its conference topic was on school "integration" across all member countries. This may make good geopolitical and logistical sense here, but the foreigners had been laboring on reform ideas for six months under the assumption or hope that Kyrgyzstan might or would seek to master it's own destiny and undertake some independent reforms. This certainly would have been the Asian Development Bank's perspective as well, since they have an "Asian" rather than Russian interest. Why had we been meeting for so long on these matters if Moscow would yet remain the center of the local school universe?

It was also difficult to read what the assignment of a representative from the president's apparat to SK's staff meetings in early June actually meant. Was this to show support from the White House that education reforms were important for him, or to investigate if and how SK's agenda might conflict with his own or that of other powerful people in government? Or that there were limits upon how far she should be "relying on Americans" for ideas? AI, the (Kyrgyz) USAID staff member who by now was asked to attend most MoEC staff meetings, reported a very recent change of heart on the part of the former minister of education, now deputy minister under SK. He had previously criticized the workings of our planning groups, but AI said his tune had now changed. Perhaps he had insider information from those higher than SK that support for some of her ideas was in the works. At this point, all we can do is speculate.

Then there were some long-term as well as more immediate distressing issues regarding the potential for school reform – particularly for foreigners paying attention. For example, all during our meetings we had heard about previous international studies and programs related to Kyrgyz education reform, but not discussed by SK. Why had she not adopted or asked our teams to review the UNESCO Education for All protocols accepted by a previous minister, for example, as part of our deliberations? The EFA program provided guidelines and targets for primary and secondary school reform, and UNESCO even underwrote a study of schooling needs in Kyrgyzstan. Had SK read these documents? Did she realize that some of what they proposed to help with was very consistent with her expressed aims?

Then we also learned that the Asian Development Bank in-country representative (MM) was leaving the country and not to be replaced by the Bank due to inactivity of the Kyrgyz Government. Unspent money was available, but not applied for. Apparently the bank decided they did not need to run

an office and employ an administrator to just sit. He spent his last month in Bishkek writing letters and having meetings with SK on ideas she could pursue under terms of the ADB guidelines. He also helped her draft a letter to the Bank asking for some extension in time to consider proposals for establishing an MoEC Human Resource division, and for further work on the idea of an external testing agency that might be constructed with ADB funds. MM firmly believed that many of the human resource ideas that the working groups had proposed aligned with those of the bank, but time had just about run out for SK to commit to going ahead and asking for needed monies on his watch. Either she was waiting for approval from highers-up, or could not decide which of the many, many suggestions ought to have priority.

What are the long-term prospects for secondary school reform in the Kyrgyz Republic, based upon my observations? Very mixed, in my judgement. On the one hand, there is a highly visible charismatic and previously successful advocate for school reform in the country in the person of SK. She inspires allegiance and commitment from locals and foreigners alike in her efforts. She has and can attract foreign sources to her aid, she has the respect of many donor agencies in the republic, and there are some in the MoEC who can sense the collapsing public school system around them and who believe she has a plan. If there is to be any movement toward school reform that would please those in the West that might come from a local actor, this may be the best chance. And for sure there are now dozens of more local education officials who have heard the foreigners talk of efficiency and rationality as if they believed it. On the other hand, SK's problems remain daunting. How to begin this list?

At this point it may be time to return to the "structural anomalies" perspective of Steve Heyneman outlined earlier in this work. Many of the issues he identified remain here as serious impediments to systematic reform. There are of course the extreme fiscal problems of this country that schools have little control over. Were the national school budget doubled next year, there would yet be poorly paid teachers, insufficient curricular materials, and crumbling school buildings all over the republic. There would also still not be adequate information-age technologies in national schools. So part of the problem is money, but also part of the problem from a Western perspective is that there are no "budgets." There is little "rationality" in the Kyrgyz educational system because the national and regional governments do not allocate or distribute money to the education ministry in any coherent way that could lead to careful

planning of what to do with it when it comes. It comes late, it does not come, and it cannot be used for logical but unplanned purposes. There is no "budgeting." here as it is understood in the West. In Soviet times some plant or collective could be ordered or induced to cover a local school need on some sort of exchange basis. In the Kyrgyz Republic today, this understanding seems to remain. No one will officially cut programs from the "budget" because most officials still believe that someone will come to their aid next month or next year. This logic usually worked before.

And who will come to the aid of a ministry or a school at the last moment? Well, this also hearkens to a "structural anomaly," although we certainly can find it in the West. This is the notion of connections, or "k*risha.*" Ministries and schools and virtually every form of social organization involves what "team" you are on, and how powerful your "team" is in the competition for scare resources and status. If you want to run a university and you have a credential (which many here believe you can get illicitly), then the next thing you need is a powerful friend in the president's cabinet or in parliament. If you are a university rector and some reforms proposed by the Minister of Education and Culture threaten your position, here it may be possible to get her or him removed in the next cabinet reshuffle. This would likely depend upon whether as the Minister of Education and Culture *your* connection is more powerful than that of your opponent.

This last hypothetical example is not given by chance. Higher education needs and demands are clearly the driving force in education in the Kyrgyz Republic. Professors and deans have some power here; schoolteachers have little. Parents want their children to go to the university. Powerful parents demand access to universities, and the quality of the university is secondary to its inherited status. Parenthetically, the demand for higher education in Kyrgyzstan and the fact that education ministers since independence have all been university people belies the observation that to the foreign eye, the secondary schools of this country are in real crisis, not just lacking some amenities. To hear the discourse on school reform and school issues in our working groups did not capture this feeling at all to my mind. You cannot really feel the crisis in Bishkek, the capital city; but this is where almost all discussants in our groups were from, and the capital's schools were what most seemed to know something about. How these study groups would have proceeded with real representation from poor rural parents or a teachers' union might have been quite

revealing. But parents have no power in Kyrgyzstan to affect policy, and there are no teacher unions in Central Asia as they are known even in the former Eastern Soviet Republics or in the Russian Federation.

SK's most powerful opponents here are university leaders: she has argued that resources for secondary schools are inadequate because the republican budget is too heavily invested in university programs that are no longer needed in post-Soviet times. She has targeted higher education reform as a high priority, and wants the state to "diminish" funding for most public universities. But this "rational" argument is likely to get her removed one day as her opponents really believe her aims are personal rather than professional. As I argued before, none of the university rectors invited to talk about school reform in our meetings remained in discussions of secondary schools. Most likely remain convinced that SK has personal grudges against them, and personal histories go back a long way. Kyrgyzstan is a small country. If SK wants to make some changes, she actually does have to make them fast. Since 1991 there have been six different education ministers! The first of them, Chinara Zhakupova, shared a similar Moscow State University pedigree and university reform agenda as SK. She lasted only about two years as an educational reformer in the early 1990s. So SK understands that she may not be here next year to supervise some three or five year transition period detailed in some rational strategic plan.

Another anomaly from a Western perspective is the real absence of ministry experts or expertise related to such areas as school management, tests and measurement and program evaluation.(33) Effects of classroom size on learner outcomes? Norm-based versus criterion-based achievement tests to focus the curriculum upon? Strategies and issues in the construction of a standardized national achievement test? We have these literatures and these technologies (and attendant debates) in the West. Here there is virtually no such competence in the MoEC or in higher education programs. There are no '''test and measurement" faculties, no "program evaluation" people; no "educational leadership" professors. The Soviets philosophically eschewed such practices and training, and this legacy remains in Kyrgyzstan. Local educators of course have their counter claims about the lack of sophistication foreign advisors (particularly Americans) when it comes to expertise in such curricular areas as humanities and foreign languages. Points well taken to my mind; and points clearly articulated in various working group

meetings. But this contrast too reflects the differing interpretations as to what is central when talking about public education.

This previous debate also relates to the problem of corruption that both locals and foreigners acknowledge, but which the foreigners primarily have any structural plan to combat. Locals admit it is a problem, but voice policies to catch rule breakers as opposed to creating structural reforms in schooling. Foreigners, meanwhile, scream about how corruption undercuts the possibilities for serious focus on academic programs and achievement, (i.e., it is not "rational"). But of course it really *is* rational (or legitimate) from the perspective of many locals. The belief here is that everyone cheats and/or takes bribes, right from the top. And the pay for schoolteachers puts them way below the poverty line. Most students will confide that they have paid for grades. These may be in the form of gifts; they may be in the form of cash; they may be in the form of future or past favors. Everyone complains that corruption is a problem. Most who make this complaint are likely participants in the process one way or another. It is in the system. And systems without money, that were "irrational" previously, are even harder to change.

SK has her work cut out for her. The schools of the nation yet decline. National resources are still not returning to them. Few want to face the reality that an education system once locally thought to be among the best in the world is in tatters. There are declining resources to even review what the schools of the country are proposing to teach, let alone what is actually being learned. Everyone wants the system to grow and expand, no one wants to retrench. Everyone waits and expects for the government or maybe even some of the foreigners to help them out. This probably will not be enough.

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FOOTNOTES

1. See for example Martha Olcott, The Kazaks (2nd edition). Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1995; James Critchlow, Nationalism in Uzbekistan. Boulder Colorado, Westview Press, 1991; or Gregory Gleason, The Central Asian States. Boulder, Westview Press, 1997.

2. Robert Arnove, Philip Altbach and Gail Kelley, Emergent Issues in Education : Comparative Perspectives, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992; Joel Spring, Education and the Rise of the Global Economy. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 2000.

3. Alan J. DeYoung was J. William Fulbright Scholar to the Arabaev Pedagogical University, 2001, and has taught at four different universities in former Soviet Central Asia since 1995. He has written several monographs on the status of secondary school reform in these countries during this period.

4. See David Fetterman, Ethnography in Educational Evaluation (Beverly Hills CA, Sage Publications, 1990); Corrine Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers (New York; Longman Publishers, 1999); or Sharan Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education (San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 1998) for description of the aims and procedures of qualitative case studies in education.

5. Alan J. DeYoung, The Rectors Strike Back: Higher Education Reform Dilemmas in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2001. Manuscript in preparation.

6. See Michael Rywkin, Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia. London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990; or Martha Olcott, op. cit.

7. Gregory Gleason, op. cit.

8. Gleason, op. cit., pg 94.

9. See for example, Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: A Case Study for Conflict Potential." The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review, 24 (3), 1997, 229-249.

10. Kyrgyzstan Common Country Assessment (CCA). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, October, 1999. United Nations System in Kyrgyzstan.

11. See for example the UNESCO sponsored country report on Education for All. Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, 1999.

12. Olcott, op. cit.

13. See Brian Holmes, Gerald Read and Natalya Voskresenskaya, Russian Education: Tradition and Transition. New York: Garland Publishing, 1995. See also Stephen Kerr's, "USSR" in P. Cookson, A. Sednovik, and S. Semel, (eds.) International Handbook of Educational Reform. New York: Greenwood Press: 473-493, 1993; and Mervyn Mathew's Education in the Soviet Union. London, 1982.

14. Gleason, op. cit., pg. 38.

15. See Kerr, op. cit., and Ben Ekloff, "Democracy in the Russian School: Educational Reform Since 1984." In Democracy in the Russian School: The Reform Movement in Education Since 1984, Eklof B., and Dneprov, E. (eds.). Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1993, pp. 1-33.

16. Anara Tabysyshalieva, "Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia." Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia. Washington, DC: World Bank Discussion Papers No. 411: 51.

17. See for example Kenneth Jowitt. "A World Without Leninism." In Global Transformation and the Third World, R. Slater, B. Schutz and S. Dorr (eds): 9-27. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993. See also Charles H. Fairbanks, "The Feudalization of the State." Journal of Democracy Vol. 10 (2) April, 1999, pp 47-53.

18. Charles Fairbanks, op. cit. pp 48-49.

19. Kenneth Jowitt, op. cit. p 11.

20. See Steven Kerr, op. cit. See also Alan J. DeYoung and Suzhikova Balshan, "Issues in Post-Soviet School Reform: The Case of Kazakhstan." International Journal of Educational Reform. Volume 6 (4), 1997, pp 441-454.

21. See this discussion in several chapters in Eklof and Dneprov, op. cit; or in Holmes et. al., op. cit. See also the essay by Stephen P. Heyneman, "The Transition from Party/State to Open Democracy: The Role of Education ." International Journal of Educational Development, 1998. Volume 18, No. 1, pp. 21-40. The best recent review of Russian Federation School Reform is by Stephen Webber, School, Reform and Society in the New Russia. New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000.

22. Stephen P. Heyneman, ibid.

23. For example, CCA, op. cit.; Asian Development Bank: Review of Kyrgyz Social Expenditures, volume 2. Manilla, the Phillipines, July 31, 2000.

24 David M. Fetterman, op. cit; Sharan B. Merriam, op. cit; Robert K. Yin, Case Study Research: Design and Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.

25. Robert K. Yin, op. cit., p.8.

26. Times of Central Asia, February, 2001.

27. George Soros argues that capitalist development alone cannot transform Post-Soviet republics into open, civic societies. See this argument in his Open Society : Reforming Global Capitalism. New York, Public Affairs, 2000. See the related discussion in Stephen P. Heyneman, "From the Party/State to Multiethnic Democracy: Education and Social cohesion in Europe and Central Asia." Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Volume 22 (2), Summer 2000, pp 173-191. See more specifically The Soros Foundation Network report, Building Open Societies. New York, Open Society Institute, 1999.

28. Building Open Societies, ibid., pp. 42-43.

29. Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan; Programs 2001. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, pp. 8-12.

30. Report of the Working Group Examining Retraining and New Technologies. May 28, 2001.

31. Letter to the TRNT convenor, June 8, 2001.

32. Report of The Working Group Examining School Management and Minimum Standards for Secondary Education in the Kyrgyz Republic. May 30 , 2001.

33. The Kyrgyz MoEC has 2 official occasional publications, "El Agartuu" and "Kut Bilim." Each profiles teaching practices and changes in school law, etc. Neither is "scholarly," and there is no tradition of published peer-refereed research here other than what can be obtained from Russia.